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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 001411

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TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: IRANIAN PARLIAMENT SPEAKER HADDAD-ADEL VISITS  
AZERBAIJAN

REF: BAKU 1052

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Classified By: Acting DCM Joan Polaschik for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Iranian Parliament Speaker Gholamali Haddad-Adel visited Azerbaijan November 23-24, postponed due to a visit by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to Azerbaijan in October according to Azerbaijani and Iranian press reports. Haddad-Adel's visit received extensive coverage in the Azerbaijani press, including his meetings with President Aliyev, Caucasus Muslim Board Chairman Pasazada, and Azerbaijani Parliament Speaker Asadov. Haddad-Adel said during a November 23 press conference that regional issues, issues related to "interference from nations outside the region on regional issues," and Iran's "peaceful nuclear activities" were discussed. Embassy contacts and political commentators believe that Haddad-Adel's visit was likely driven by both domestic and international considerations, with the Iranian government eager to showcase domestically that bilateral ties with neighboring states are strong while at the same time continuing to seek assurances that any possible military confrontation with the West will not be launched from a neighboring state. Some Azerbaijani papers questioned the Government of Azerbaijan's (GOAJ) warm embrace of a state that also pursues close ties with Armenia.  
End Summary.

Extensive Press Coverage  
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¶2. (U) Iranian Parliament Speaker Gholamali Haddad-Adel's second official visit to Azerbaijan November 23-24 received extensive coverage in the Azerbaijani press, with Haddad-Adel's meetings with President Aliyev, Prime Minister Artur Rasizada, Caucasus Muslim Board Chairman Pasazada, and Azerbaijani Parliament Speaker Asadov figuring most prominently. Originally scheduled for October, Haddad-Adel's visit was postponed due to a visit to Azerbaijan by delegation representing AIPAC according to both Azerbaijani and Iranian press reports. Azerbaijani evening television news coverage featured Haddad-Adel's meeting with President Aliyev, press conference (which preceded Haddad-Adel's departure for Ganja where he visited the tomb of poet Nezami Ganjavi, revered by both Azerbaijanis and Iranians), and conferral of an honorary doctoral degree by Baku State University.

¶3. (U) Haddad-Adel used media opportunities to stress three major themes. Addressing journalists at the press conference which preceded his departure for Ganja, Haddad-Adel first

defended Iran's "peaceful nuclear program," claiming that the International Atomic Energy Agency "has approved Iran's peaceful nuclear activities." Haddad-Adel addressed the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, saying that Iran supported Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and welcomed a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Speaking to Students at Baku State University, Haddad-Adel touched upon a third major theme, saying that "third forces will fail in their attempts to spoil relations between Azerbaijan and Iran."

¶4. (U) Iranian Azeri-language Seher Television focused its coverage on statements considered supportive of Iran and those which suggested either an expansion of or deepening of ties between the two countries. Covering Haddad-Adel's meeting with Prime Minister Rasizada, Seher's presenter quoted Rasizada as saying "the world should accept the logical policy pursued by Iran," a reference to Iran's nuclear program. Concerning Haddad-Adel's statement calling for an end to the visa regime between the two countries, Seher reported that this statement had been "welcomed by the Azerbaijani people."

#### Drivers of the Visit

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¶5. (C) While the full range and nature of discussions remains unclear, Haddad-Adel said during the news conference that regional issues, issues related to "interference from nations outside the region on regional issues," and Iran's "peaceful nuclear activities" were discussed. Embassy contacts and political commentators believe that Haddad-Adel's visit was likely driven by both domestic and international considerations, with the Iranian government eager to showcase to a domestic audience that bilateral ties with neighboring states are strong while at the same time continuing to see assurances that any possible military

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confrontation with the West not be launched from a neighboring state. Commentators also noted that Iran was unhappy with Azerbaijan's efforts to resolve the status of its Caspian border with neighboring Turkmenistan, and with Azerbaijan's interest in exploring the feasibility of a Trans-Caspian pipeline with Turkmenistan.

#### Iran's Relations with Armenia Still Rankle

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¶6. (C) While Haddad-Adel and his Azerbaijani hosts characterized the visit as "positive and successful," some Azerbaijani media outlets, already highly skeptical about Iran's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, questioned stronger ties with Iran at a time when Iran is also seeking to bolster ties with neighboring Armenia. To some Azerbaijani journalists, Haddad-Adel's statement that strong Iranian-Azerbaijani relations might serve as an example in the region struck a raw nerve because Haddad-Adel, during his recent visit to Armenia, stated that strong Iranian-Armenian relations might also serve as an example in the region. Many Azerbaijani journalists found this to be highly objectionable, believing that Iran sees no difference between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

#### Comment

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¶7. (C) Like Iranian President Ahmadinejad's recent visit to Baku (reftel), the Speaker's visit highlighted the positive elements of the complex relationship between Azerbaijan and Iran. Senior Azerbaijani officials tell us that Iranian officials seek regular high-level contact with Azerbaijan as part of their efforts to fight back against Iran's growing international isolation. And while these senior GOAJ officials are careful to maintain correct relations with their more powerful neighbor, they also continue to seek balance through close relations with the U.S., Europe, and

Israel.  
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